

SENATE—Wednesday, March 10, 1999

The Senate met at 12 noon and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. THURMOND).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, You have created us to love You with our minds. Thank You for the ability to think Your thoughts after You. When we commit our thinking to You, You inspire us with greater insight, creative solutions, and innovative answers to our problems. We ask You to flow into our minds with fresh vision just as the tide flows into stagnant backwater with cleansing, refreshing, renewing power. We focus on each of the complexities we must face during the remainder of this week, and we ask You to give us ideas we would never have formulated without You. Bless the Senators today with profound insight and foresight to lead our great Nation. You have called all of them to serve You here at this time. You have granted them intellectual ability. Now guide their thinking so they will conceive Your plans and follow Your guidance. Through our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The able acting majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. JEFFORDS. Mr. President, today the Senate will resume consideration of S. 280, the education flexibility partnership bill. The leader would like to announce that negotiations are ongoing between the two sides in an effort to complete action on this important legislation. However, until an agreement has been reached, the Senate will continue consideration of the Ed-Flex bill, as outlined in yesterday's unanimous consent agreement.

Pursuant to that order, the time until 1 p.m. will be equally divided for debate on the bill and, at the conclusion of that debate time, the Senate will proceed to two back-to-back roll-call votes. The first vote will be on the motion to invoke cloture on the Kennedy-Murray motion to recommit and, assuming that fails, a second vote will occur on a motion to invoke cloture on the Jeffords-Lott IDEA amendment.

Following those votes, and if an agreement has been reached, all Members will be notified of the remaining schedule for today's session.

I thank my colleagues for their attention, and I yield the floor.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. ASHCROFT). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

EDUCATION FLEXIBILITY PARTNERSHIP ACT

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there will now be an hour for debate to be equally divided between the chairman and the ranking minority member of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

The Senator from Massachusetts.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, we will start off with 5 minutes for the Senator from Louisiana and try to get some additional time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Louisiana.

Ms. LANDRIEU. Mr. President, let me thank the distinguished Senator from Massachusetts for his leadership on this issue. He is trying to communicate, and I think eloquently so, the issue before us. This week we want to do something good, something that is meaningful, something that will help in our education system in this country. We need to spend more than just a few days. It has been a little discouraging, I think, for some of us, on both sides of the aisle, in our evident lack of ability to come to some reasonable agreements about some of these amendments, so they are preventing this good bill from passing.

I am a cosponsor of the Ed-Flex bill, along with Members of the Republican side and other Democrats who are supporting this bill. Why? Because our Governors at home are supporting this bill; our superintendents at home are supporting this bill.

I had the great privilege of cohosting, with my Governor and superintendent of education, and our BESE, which is the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education, just Monday in our State, over 250 education leaders from all over the State, from all of our 64 parishes. They came and expressed their support for the idea that the Federal Government should give the schools, the States and the districts more flexibility so they can combine programs to more efficiently spend the money, as long as the basic regulations of safety, health and civil rights are there. They really want the flexibility. I would like to give it to them, and I know the distinguished Senator from

Massachusetts and our leader from Vermont wants to, also.

So, I am hoping we can come to some agreement. If we could offer a few amendments on our side and other amendments could be offered on the Republican side, amendments that are meaningful, then we could get this bill passed with a couple of other things that will work and need to be done.

One of those things is the reduction of class size. I don't believe there is an educator who would disagree. Whether you are from California or Vermont or Louisiana or Illinois, who doesn't know that having smaller classes at those earlier grades—particularly kindergarten, first, second and third grades—is so important?

I could give this speech pretty well before I was a mom. Now I can give it very well. Frank and I have a 6-year-old who is learning to read this year. With 28 kids in his class, it is a struggle. He has a tutor. We help him at home. But the teacher does not have enough time individually.

We want to be able to send some money down to the States, with very few strings attached, to help our school districts that are really struggling in this area, to give them some additional money to help them hire additional teachers. In doing that, as I was told this Monday—and I want to communicate this to my colleagues—it would be no use to send that money down to help reduce class size if we also do not send a companion amendment down for school construction and modernization. You cannot have a new teacher if you don't have a classroom or you don't have the space for that teacher to teach and to divide those classes into smaller units.

We have a crisis in our country at this moment. That crisis is that 40 percent of our youngsters at the second grade level are not reading at second grade level. Let me repeat that: not 2 percent, not 10 percent, not 25 percent—but 40 percent. Unfortunately, in some places in Louisiana, in some demographic groups, that number is tragically as high as 70 percent.

If this is not something the Federal Government should be concerned about, I don't know what is. I don't know of anything that is more significant than having second graders in this country—the strongest country, militarily, in the world, economically strong, leading the world in many areas—but lagging behind in this simple basic.

Local governments can do some things. The State government most certainly is the big partner. But we